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Tuesday, 14 December 2010, 10.35 a.m.

New York

President:	Ms. Rice	(United States of America)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Yang Tao
	France	Mr. Briens
	Gabon	Mr. Moungara Moussotsi
	Japan	Mr. Arima
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Puente
	Nigeria	Mr. Onemola
	Russian Federation	Mr. Panin
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Quarrey

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: On behalf of the Security Council, I extend an invitation under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Allow me, Madam President, to convey to you and your Government my sorrow and condolences at the passing of one of your distinguished predecessors in the position of Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke. His distinguished career as a tireless peacemaker and diplomat is, I think, well-known to all of us, and will always remain a personal inspiration to me. We mourn his passing.

At the outset, let me also express once again my sympathy and that of the Secretary-General to Israel, following the death of 43 people in a fire on Mount Carmel two weeks ago. That tragedy was one of the worst natural disasters in the country's history. Assistance came from the region, including from the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, as well as from further afield. Prime Minister Netanyahu has expressed Israel's gratitude for the solidarity and material support.

In September, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas pledged to seek a framework agreement on permanent status within a year. While that goal remains in place, the process for achieving it has suffered a serious setback. In particular, the Secretary-General regrets Israel's failure to institute a renewed settlement freeze. On 8 December, American efforts to create an environment conducive to the resumption of direct talks, through the renewal of a settlement freeze, were brought to a close. Palestinian President Abbas has reaffirmed that he will not return to direct negotiations unless Israel freezes settlement activity.

During the reporting period in East Israeli authorities approved 130 new hom settlement of Gilo and the construction of 625 was announced in the Pisgat Ze'ev settleme remainder of the West Bank, according to vario there has been a significant increase in constru the moratorium expired on 26 September. Ac the Israeli non-governmental organization Pe construction for 1,600 settlement units has s way of comparison, approximately 1920 u commenced during 2009.

We would like to make clear that t Nations will continue to emphasize that activity is contrary to international law, the and the position of the Quartet. We reiterate position of the international community t should meet its obligations to freeze all activity and dismantle outposts erected sin 2001.

Here in New York, on 10 Decembe envoys met with United States Envoy M advance of his trip to the region, and Unit Secretary of State Clinton gave a sp Washington, D.C., on the same day. The nee strategy is evident. We understand that th States will now engage both sides in indirec all the final status issues, and the Secretar expects the parties to engage seriously. We that the United States intends to be a participant, offering ideas and bridging propo appropriate. We believe it is clear that a su third-party role in mediation is now required. must be a two-State solution based on an e 1967 occupation and a resolution of all core is

United States Envoy Mitchell is curren region and saw Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas today, before Presider departure for a meeting of the League of Ar Follow-Up Committee tomorrow in Cairo. W close consultation within the Quartet on the the period ahead. Quartet envoys are pre meeting of Quartet principals, which we expe place soon in the new year. The Secreta continue to keep the Security Council ap developments through the monthly briefings.

In response to requests from Presider Brazil and Argentina recognized the indepen of Palestine, within borders that conform

ceasefire lines of 1967, on 3 and 6 December, respectively. Yesterday, the European Union Council of Ministers reiterated its readiness, when appropriate, to recognize a Palestinian State.

Quartet envoys also discussed the urgent need to further enable the State-building efforts of the Palestinian Authority. A number of Israeli steps have been under consideration for some time, among them the further easing of restrictions on movement and access, a reduction of Israeli incursions, measures to enable the Palestinian Authority's efforts to extend into Area C of the West Bank, and the release of prisoners. Such measures are now timely and essential. Israel needs to roll back measures of occupation as the Palestinian Authority rolls out the basis for statehood. Quartet Representative Blair's efforts are important in this regard.

The World Bank reports that, in the third quarter of 2010, the Palestinian Authority made steady progress on implementing its reform programme, maintaining financial discipline and achieving its budget targets for expenditures. Public financial management systems were further strengthened, while a pension reform plan was adopted to improve efficiency and sustainability.

Palestinian security forces continue to make commendable efforts to maintain security in areas currently under their control in the West Bank. As the Secretary-General noted in his message on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it is indisputable that a reliable security partner has emerged. According to estimates, the number of Israeli troops operating in the occupied West Bank is at its lowest level since 2005.

However, tensions persist. Israeli security forces, citing security concerns, conducted 193 incursions into Area A in the reporting period, resulting in 21 Palestinians injured and 98 arrested, among them a Palestinian Legislative Council member from the Hamas-affiliated Change and Reform bloc. On 23 November, Israeli security forces discovered seven pipe bombs in a Palestinian vehicle at a checkpoint near Tulkarem and subsequently seized arms and ammunition in a raid. Violent clashes continued between Israeli security forces and anti-barrier demonstrators, and on 6 December an Israeli military tribunal extended the detention of anti-barrier activist Abdallah Abu Rahmah beyond his scheduled release. We note reports that the number of arrests and interrogations of children have increased significantly, in particular in the Silwan district of East Jerusalem, in recent months. There were eight attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians or their property, injuring two Palestinians, while three attacks by Palestinians resulted in one Israeli settler injured.

The number of obstacles to access and movement in the West Bank currently stands at 513. I believe that these can and should be meaningfully reduced in quantity and quality in a manner consistent with maintaining security.

The parties should show discipline and responsibility in refraining from provocative actions. In this regard, I am worried that there has been a rise in demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures in the reporting period, with 14 structures demolished in Area C and 12 demolished in East Jerusalem, displacing 53 people. I have also expressed publicly my concern that, on 8 December, a Palestinian Legislative Council member of the Hamas-affiliated Change and Reform bloc was forcibly transferred from Jerusalem to Ramallah following an Israeli court order. This case and that of three other lawmakers currently facing court proceedings continue to raise serious human rights concerns regarding Palestinian residency rights in East Jerusalem.

I am concerned that a study prepared under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Information denied the religious significance of the Western Wall to Jews. I note that this regrettable study has been removed from the Authority's website. I stress the need for figures of political and religious authority on both sides to refrain from denial or denigration of the other's heritage, rights and dignity.

We continue to follow with concern indications by the Israeli authorities that more restrictive procedures will be applied for crossing points between East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank. While we are cognizant of security concerns, proposed changes must not add new impediments to the United Nations and other international operations, which will be to the detriment of beneficiaries. We are engaging the Israeli authorities on the matter both in New York and on the ground.

The humanitarian Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) was launched on 30 November, totalling $575 million and comprising 213 projects. The CAP

articulates a humanitarian strategy for critical needs in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It aims at addressing humanitarian needs, focusing particularly on areas where the Palestinian Authority has limited control and where needs are not fully met by the Government of Israel. United Nations agencies are increasingly facing difficulties in obtaining the required funds from the international community. I ask donors to fully support the 2011 CAP to prevent further deterioration in living conditions.

This brings me to Gaza, where we are concerned at recent volatility as well as ongoing closure measures. However, there have also been positive developments. On 8 December, Israel decided to allow exports from Gaza, consistent with security conditions. The resumption of exports is key to reviving Gaza's economy and its legitimate business sector. We welcome this measure and hope that it will include all commercial goods, subject to security considerations, and that crossing capacity will be enhanced as necessary to meet demands. The implementation of this decision will be closely monitored. I appreciate the continued engagement of Quartet Representative Blair on this issue. The United Nations continues to seek the end of closure of the Gaza Strip within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009).

The weekly number of truckloads entering the Gaza Strip decreased slightly to 997 from 1,026 during the most recent reporting period and 566 in June 2010 before the announcement of the revised Israeli Gaza policy. A weekly average of 2,800 trucks entered Gaza in June 2007.

United Nations agencies have received approval to complete construction projects in Gaza totalling $110 million. This is a positive step, but further progress is critical. I have discussed with the Israeli authorities the need for approval and implementation procedures to move faster and urged them to allow the provision of construction material to the private sector in Gaza and to expedite further approvals of United Nations projects, including more United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools before the end of the year. I remind the Council that, with very few exceptions, the 1.5 million people of Gaza are unable to leave the Strip for the normal purposes that most of us take for granted, and freer movement of people must also be a priority.

It is essential that calm be maintain
facto authorities have publicly repeated the
maintain calm, although militant groups fire
and 20 mortar shells from Gaza into Israel
wounded an Israeli on 8 December in th
Negev, while a rocket hit a civilian house o
day. On the previous day, a rocket, for
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestin
responsibility, struck in the south of Ashkelon

I condemn indiscriminate rocket fire
Allegations continue to be made of
smuggling into the Gaza Strip. During the
period, Israeli security forces conducted 4 a
and 12 incursions into Gaza. In total, four P
militants were killed and one was injured,
Palestinian civilians were also injured. I st
importance of maximum Israeli restraint
underscore the need for all parties to protect
and respect international humanitarian law.

I reiterate the calls by the United Nations
immediate release of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit
humanitarian access to be granted to him. I co
President Abbas's call on Shalit's captors to relea
It is deeply regrettable that a prisoner exchange
not yet been concluded. I also note that an intern
Arab conference stressing concern for Pale
prisoners was hosted by Algeria on 5 and 6 Decem

I am concerned that the de facto authori
Gaza issued a temporary closure order to the offi
the Sharek Youth Forum, an imp
non-governmental organization partner of the
Nations and other international agencies. I ca
Sharek to be permitted to continue its work in
without further delay or undue hindrance. I stre
importance of full respect for the work of legit
civil society organizations in Gaza and the ne
uphold fundamental freedoms of association
expression.

There has been no progress in efforts to re
Palestinian unity within the framework of
legitimate Palestinian Authority and Palesti
Liberation Organization commitments. On the gro
I am concerned by signs of tensions. My O
continues to urge an end to any challenges to
legitimate Palestinian Authority, and to call for resp
for human rights by all security forces in Gaza or
West Bank. Palestinian Authority security for
arrested members of a Hamas cell in the West Ba

allegedly preparing attacks against Palestinian and Israeli targets, and Hamas security forces detained a number of Fatah members throughout the Gaza Strip. Internal calm is needed, if reconciliation is to progress.

We are also concerned at the continuing lack of progress in the effort to promote peace negotiations between Israel and Syria and at public expressions of lack of confidence in the prospects for progress. While the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained stable, despite continued settlement activity, the resolution of the conflict between the two countries on the basis of Security Council resolutions is important in its own right and critical for regional stability, and is an essential part of realizing the vision of the Arab Peace Initiative.

I note that contacts by diplomatic actors continue with a view to exploring possibilities for progress. Recalling also that Turkey has in the past been an important facilitator of efforts on the regional track, we hope that recent contacts between Israel and Turkey in the aftermath of Turkey's provision of assistance to fight the Carmel fire can help the two countries overcome past tensions.

I now turn to Lebanon, where political activity continues to be dominated by speculation concerning the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Differences between opposing political camps brought about the suspension of cabinet meetings from 10 November until a meeting now scheduled for tomorrow, 15 December. Lebanese parties continue to express their support for efforts by countries in the region, particularly Syria and Saudi Arabia, to promote stability in Lebanon. In his meetings with representatives from a broad range of political parties in Lebanon, Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams has continued to encourage all parties to resolve any disagreement through dialogue and through the regular institutions of the State.

The reconstruction effort in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared continues to face challenges. With the return of the first 2,000 refugees to the camp expected by January 2011, I urge donors to continue to provide vital financial assistance for the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared and to the UNRWA General Fund.

Over the last month, the overall situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been generally quiet. Air violations have continued to take place on an almost daily basis. During the reporting period, Special Coordinator Williams and UNIFIL Force Commander General Asarta Cuevas held consultations with the parties to discuss details related to the 17 November decision of the Israeli Security Cabinet to accept, in principle, the United Nations proposal for a withdrawal of the Israeli Defence Forces from the northern part of the village of al-Ghajar.

In conclusion, I cannot overemphasize the importance of the period we are now entering. The parties have set for themselves important timelines, which have received strong international endorsement, and 2011 is the year in which they are to be met. It is vital that both parties now be fully forthcoming on substance in talks with the United States and that further measures be taken on the ground without delay to strengthen and enable the agenda of Palestinian State building. We must also continue to focus on improving conditions in Gaza, while calm must be maintained.

We must focus with urgency on the essential elements of a negotiated two-State endgame, for the benefit of both peoples. We urge leaders on both sides to do so, and we also believe that an active third-party role on substance is essential if that is to be done. Close consultation within the Quartet is important in that regard. In the year ahead, the credibility of the political process and its sponsors, including the Quartet, will also be at stake. The Secretary-General will continue to work with the parties, the Quartet and regional and international partners in pursuit of a lasting two-State solution and comprehensive peace in the region.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.